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Introduction: The emotional dynamics of backlash politics beyond anger, hate, fear, pride and loss¹

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¹ The order of the authors recognizes the first author's overall project leadership but does not reflect a strict ranking of the contribution of each author either to this introduction or the volume as a whole. While Busher led the initial development of the publication project, it was done very much in partnership with Giurlando; and while Busher drafted this introduction, it was significantly enhanced through theoretical comments and insights provided by Sullivan. Giurlando and Sullivan both further contributed to the project through paper presentations at the workshop out of which this volume was developed, but did not submit them to the special issue.

Introduction: The emotional dynamics of backlash politics beyond anger, hate, fear, pride and loss

The activists from March for England, a group that had worked closely, although not always seen eye to eye, with the English Defence League, for some years the UK's most prominent anti-Muslim protest movement, gathered outside Brighton station. It was an excellent day for a St. George's day parade: warm spring sunshine, just a light breeze. The activists, many wearing, wrapped in or carrying England flags, greeted one another, and shared a joke and a drink as their talk turned to the day ahead. The marchers enacted and expressed a range of emotions. There was evident excitement and anxiety as they discussed parade logistics. They expected a degree of opposition from anti-fascist groups: there always was in Brighton. For some this was part of the attraction. Yet March for England had only managed to muster a small group today – 150 or so – including a number of families and some marchers with limited mobility. There were also, as might be expected, expressions of national pride, felt most intensely during lustily sung renditions of “God Save the Queen” and “England ‘til I die”. National pride mixed with personal pride, appreciation of and respect for their fellow marchers: for being the people who had made the effort to be there and were willing to march despite the anticipated opposition. These feelings were however infused with and accentuated through other emotions and affects: of loss, disappointment, embarrassment, shame even, that in England today so few people seemed to celebrate St. George's day. Some activists spoke enviously of other countries, such as the USA, France and Ireland, where they perceived national days to be more widely and joyfully celebrated.

The rather jovial atmosphere soon changed as the marchers left the station and the scale and intensity of the opposition became apparent. Before they arrived at the high street they had to stop because the police were having trouble clearing a route through the

opposition ranks. Fear, anxiety and anticipation quickly came to the fore. So too did performances of heroic narratives as organisers, trying to take control, issued orders:

“Women and children to the middle: men on the outside!”; “Keep together: don’t separate!”

Within 200 metres the parade had stopped again. The marchers now found themselves trapped in a narrow high street with opposition activists on all sides. There were even opponents above, at some of the windows of the buildings looking out onto the street. While a cordon of police around the parade limited opportunities for direct physical confrontation, activists on both sides became locked in aggressive verbal exchanges, their mutual contempt communicated through shouts of “SCUM!” Occasionally a bottle, a can of drink, a lump of horse-shit or glob of phlegm would land among the marchers. As fear began to mix with anger, resentment and rage, attempts to organise the marchers faded into the background and the emotional cohesion of the parade fragmented as personal interests came to the fore. Some tried to break out of the police cordon in order to confront the opposition; some sought to protect children attending the parade; some revelled in the confrontation, puffing out their chests, provoking, goading and threatening their opponents; some undertook performances of decorum, stoicism and duty, standing or walking quietly with their heads held high regardless of what insults or objects were thrown at them.

The parade was cut short by the police and the marchers soon found themselves on a nearby grassy common, surrounded by a police escort. With their opponents behind a police cordon at least 500 metres away, the marchers spread out somewhat and fell into small group conversations. There was relief, shock, righteous anger, frustration, confusion: “Why hadn’t the police cleared the route beforehand?” “How could people behave like that towards a family event?” “Did you see the girl hit by the can?” “Why hadn’t the organisers made sure there were more people here?” “Why had they advertised it as a family event?” Some activists cried, some comforted one another, most shared their own stories from the parade,

some joked, others bragged, and a handful spoke of revenge. As they did so, the marchers began to recover and reconstruct feelings of group pride, purpose and camaraderie. What in some respects had seemed like a defeat – a parade curtailed and massively outnumbered by opponents – was narratively transformed into a shared experience of unity and solidarity, an example of their bravery and dignity in the face of adversity, and an emotionally charged symbol of the supposed societal decadence unleashed by the “liberal left”, “cultural Marxists” and “multiculturalism;” one that activists would draw on during the months ahead, conditioning future interactions with their opponents, the police and other activists within their own scene. They would return the following year, with almost twice the number of marchers, a significantly lower proportion of whom would be children or people with limited mobility, and a significantly higher proportion of whom would engage in physical confrontations with opponents. (Edited fieldnotes, Brighton, UK, 22 April 2012).

One of the dominant political stories in recent years, both in the global north and elsewhere,² has been the growing backlash against what, depending on the region or country, has been conceived of by their detractors as a “liberal” or “cosmopolitan” “elite”, or simply “the establishment” – those accused of being the architects and primary beneficiaries of an increasingly internationalised (neo-)liberal order that, it is argued, has undercut national sovereignty, weakened national and sub-national systems of governance, corroded the fabric of local, regional and national cultures and exposed “ordinary people” more than ever before to the vicissitudes of global markets and “big finance”. Such backlash politics has taken many forms and been characterised by varying degrees of organisation and aggression. There has been the rise to political prominence first of the Tea Party and then Donald Trump in the

² For discussions of this phenomenon outside of Europe and North America see for example the relevant chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Rovira Kaltwasser et al 2017).

USA; a resurgence of nationalist political parties and social movements across Europe, often, although not always, associated with the radical right; political mobilization from both the right and the left against the European Union (EU) including, in its most dramatic form to date, the UK's decision to leave the EU; social movements pushing back against policies intended to address racial, religious or gender inequalities; and an often more diffuse mobilization against the so-called "politics of multiculturalism" (Hewitt 2005). Arguments that were previously uttered on the political margins, are now increasingly evident within "mainstream" public and political discourse (Mueller 2016). Meanwhile, large numbers of citizens, of all ages and across many countries, have disengaged from politics (e.g. by not registering to vote or choosing not to participate in elections) and express a profound distrust of politicians (Barrett and Zani 2015).

Within the social and political sciences, standard accounts of resistance to and overt backlash against "the establishment" and their "liberal" social and political order have typically focused primarily on structural variables, such as income levels, labour markets, the reproduction of economic inequality, migration flows, the waning of formal civil society, or declining participation in established political processes (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Kriesi 2014; Mols and Jetten 2018; Rydgren 2007); and on ideational factors, such as a resurgence of national, ethnic and religious identities, the emergence of new radical right ideologies well-suited to resonate with concerns about cultural threats and cleansed of much of the stigma of "old-fashioned racism", discourses of "anti-politics," and the corrosion of the particular credibility of "experts" (Ford and Goodwin 2014; Mueller 2016; Rydgren 2007; Weltman and Billig 2015). There is growing scholarly recognition however that in order to explain the strength and diffusion of such politics it is also necessary to engage explicitly with and understand its emotionality (see especially Ebner 2017; Hochschild 2016; Wodak

2015); part of a wider “emotional turn” in the study of politics from a number of disciplinary perspectives (for example Demertzis 2013; Hutchison and Bleiker 2014; Jasper 2011).

Our understanding of emotions within the context and as constituent parts of this wave of backlash politics remains in its infancy, however. In particular, much of the research to date has focused on identifying and describing the contours of what are often conceived of as the key, central or dominant individual and group-based emotions within such politics, with much of the attention given to emotions such as anger (Cox and Durham 2000), fear (Wodak 2015), hate (Ahmed 2001; Garland and Treadwell 2012) and pride (Pilkington 2016) – usually collective in-group pride associated with nostalgic/hostile, flag-waving nationalism – as well as loss and nostalgia (Gilroy 2004; Hochschild 2016; Sullivan 2014). This research has rendered some valuable insights, particularly with regards to how such emotions manifest, are produced, managed, shared and mobilized. It has however also encouraged a tendency for research, and for policy and media discourse, to centre on a relatively small range of discreet emotions when discussing backlash politics. This is far from ideal when, like other forms of politics, backlash politics are likely to be characterised by more complex and dynamic emotional cultures, as even the brief introductory vignette illustrates. The participants are not simply fearful or feared. Rather, engagement with or participation in such politics might provide the means to accomplish a wide range of emotional tasks: it may allow people to manifest, express and maintain their rage, cope with intolerable feelings of humiliation and defeat, feel excitement about the damage that might be caused to smug professional politicians, get revenge for years of betrayal and neglect, and experience hope that nostalgic visions of the past might still be realized in the present (Reicher and Haslam 2016). As Mueller (2016: 15) has argued, if we lean too heavily on “loaded terms” such as frustration, anger and resentment to explain the apparent surge in backlash politics, we are likely to produce a caricatured account of those who participate in or uphold such political

positions – e.g. the stereotype of mostly angry and fearful “left behind” citizens. It is well worth remembering that anger and fear are not, and should not be considered, the preserve of broadly anti-liberal or anti-establishment political formations (Henderson 2008; Jasper 2014).

The aim in developing this special issue then was to contribute towards the development of a fuller and more detailed understanding of the emotional dynamics of backlash politics. This was not of course about pitting the analysis of emotions *against* or as an *alternative to* the analysis of structural or ideational elements. Neither was it about “psychologizing” those who engage with or support forms of backlash politics (Mueller 2016: 16). Rather, building on other recent work on politics and emotions (e.g. van Troost, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013), this special issue was motivated by a desire to integrate emotions into existing theoretical perspectives, taking seriously the view that emotions are based on reasons (i.e. rather than largely irrational excesses which might spread by contagion or mimicry) and that political emotions don’t only reflect private or personal interests but also the interests, affects, practices and aims of groups, communities, institutions and even nations (Sullivan 2015).

In order to do this, we encouraged the contributors to engage with one or more of three overlapping analytical tasks. The first of these, as intimated by the title of this special issue, was to explore the emotionality of backlash politics in greater detail than has tended to be the case to date, getting beyond the overwhelming focus on, although of course not setting aside, anger, hate, fear, (nationalistic) pride and loss. Here, we were particularly interested in moving the focus of analysis beyond discreet emotions to combinations and sequences of emotions and affects. Since, as Jasper (2014, 211) notes, “[w]e rarely experience a single emotion at a time,” it seems likely that we might more productively examine the emotional dynamics of backlash politics, or of any form of politics for that matter, if we focus our attention on how multiple, and at times seemingly conflicting, emotions and affects cluster,

interact, vacillate, enable, overlap with, replace or displace one another, and so forth (Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). The March for England activists described above were able to feel nationalistic pride at the same time as sorrow, embarrassment and shame about the apparent decadence of the nation they loved, and disappointment and anger about the perceived collapse of similar national pride among many of their fellow nationals; they were able to feel solidarity with their fellow activists and admiration for their commitment and bravery while feeling let down by and even angry about their failure to better organise the parade. It is quite possible, common even, for there to be a felt discrepancy between one's foregrounded personal feelings about specific political topics and a contrasting emotional background, such as widely shared affects of excitement, optimism, disaffection or despair.

The second analytical task was to explore how this range of emotions and affects relate to the practices and positionalities of those involved in, or supportive of, the backlash against the "liberal elites". Previous research has highlighted the relationship both between (individual and group-based) appraisals and emotions, and between emotions and a range of activities central to political mobilization, including recruitment, deciding which strategies of action to pursue and sustaining participation (Summers Effler 2010; van Troost et al. 2013). As such, detailed attention to how combinations and sequences of emotions relate to the shifting practices and positionalities of those engaged with backlash politics would appear to have some potential to offer us new insight into the processes and mechanisms that shape the rise, persistence and fall of such political formations (for example Salmela and von Scheve 2017), as well as offering insights about the formation of preferences for particular action repertoires. This also raises questions about how the combinations and sequences of emotions might vary across groups organised ostensibly around different ideological positions or political goals. Is, for example, the emotionality of the backlash against the "liberal elites" from those broadly on the left the same as it is from those actors broadly on the right?

The third area that we encouraged contributors to explore was the governance of emotions within such politics and the way that emotions in turn shape the stability of political formations at micro-, meso- or macro scales, concentrating, constraining and enabling political agency. We were interested, in other words, both in the governance *of* emotions and the processes of governance *through* emotions within the context of this backlash against the “liberal elites”. Social movement researchers have long made clear that emotions do not simply emerge out of the ether and carry people along. Rather, individuals and groups at all levels within movements “manage” (Groves 1995) or “achieve” (Yang 2000) particular emotions: training emotional responses or forging a particular “emotional habitus” (Gould 2009). The March for England activists described above were not simply swept along on a tide of emotion. Rather, throughout the parade specific practices and rituals – the enactment of heroic and gendered narratives, the stoical performances of dignified resistance to the opposition, the narrative reworking of events at the end of the parade – were used to shape activists’ emotions, and in turn influenced subsequent emotional sequences and individual and collective commitment to their political cause. For some of the activists at least, for example, the management of fear through expressed anger or performances of dignity contributed to diminish potential subsequent feelings of humiliation. Emotions and affects are in turn used to undertake tasks central to mobilization, thereby opening up or restricting political agency (Castells 2012) and stabilizing or destabilizing political formations (Latif et al. this volume). Elaborating on these processes can enrich our existing explanations of the mechanisms through which various forms of backlash politics operate, rise and fall.

Each of the contributions to this special issue addresses one or more of the areas set out above. They do so drawing across a number of disciplinary perspectives: Sociology, Social

Psychology, Political Psychology, Philosophy and Political Science. They also interpret and frame in different ways the contours of backlash against “liberal elites”. For example, some make the concept of “populism” central to their analysis, others do not. What they have in common is that they all deploy the methods and conceptual toolkits of the social sciences to explore the examples of backlash politics with which they engage. In doing so, they resist the temptation to emulate elaborative and interpretative accounts of embodied, unconscious and pre-discursive affects that can circulate and attach themselves to particular discourses, groups and symbols – accounts which, while providing a potentially rich metaphor, do little to demystify the specific ways in which particular types of emotions combine to encourage particular forms of political activity and not others, and which can leave the door open to the type of “psychologizing” against which Mueller (2016) cautions. As Wetherell (2012) has previously urged, the contributors to this volume also ensure that their analysis of the emotional dynamics of backlash politics is not reducible to a description of affective discourses, but also comprises detailed representation and examination of the personal and collective features of emotions as they are enacted in individual and group practices across a variety of public spaces.

In their contribution, Capelos and Demertzis seek to enhance understanding of engagement or abstention from violent and illegal political behaviors in the context of the Eurozone economic crisis through the analysis of clusters of affectivity. Based on a three-wave survey from Greece, they explore how perceptions of self-efficacy interact with anger, fear and hope, and interrogate the relationship between the resultant affective clusters and the path of citizens’ political engagement. This is one of three contributions that makes use of the concept of *ressentiment* – a concept that has been extensively defined and redefined by Philosophers and Psychologists, among others, but which at its core contains notions of deep-seated frustration and hostility, directed at what is identified as the cause of one's frustration,

in order to repress negative self-focused emotions, such as shame. While acknowledging the methodological challenges inherent in measuring such complex affective clusters, their longitudinal analysis enables them to trace how the “emotions-politics nexus” evolved during the financial and political crises in Greece, how this process is deeply influenced by perceptions of self-efficacy, and how this in turn relates to a shifting appetite for illegal and/or violent strategies of action.

Salmela and von Scheve also make use of and operationalize the concept of *ressentiment*. Specifically they examine how patterns of *ressentiment* and the distancing from precarious social identities operate differently under left- and right-wing populist rhetoric, indicating that the emotional processes at play in driving different forms of populism are only partially similar. Their analysis reveals how differences in emotion management strategies across left- and right-wing populist formations – in particular the way that they operate through the acknowledgement or repression of shame – are likely also to shape their ability to exploit emergent emotional opportunity structures (Ruiz-Junco 2013). As they observe, such insights might be used to strengthen our explanations for the distribution of different forms of backlash politics across regional and national arenas.

Van Troost, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans shift the focus of analysis onto the relationships between protest movements and their political allies, examining how activists’ emotions are affected when their expectations about their political alliances are not met. Their analysis reminds us of the importance of the formation, maintenance and rupture of solidarities, alliances and expectations in shaping the emotional clusters of protest. Efficacy again is central to the story: as the political strength of the movement ally increases protesters’ anger gains prominence. Crucially, they also highlight that frustration is shaped by demonstrators’ appraisals not just of the relationship with their political allies but also of the political system.

The contribution by Latif, Blee, DeMichele and Simi, grounded in an exploration of life-history interviews with 47 former members of white supremacist groups from across the USA, moves the discussion to analysis of the micro- and meso-levels of social action and experience. Combining elements of identity-theory and interaction ritual theory, they examine emotion as a relational mechanism that affects the stability of political groups by activating or weakening identities, social ties, and movement boundaries. In doing so they integrate emotions into models of the development and decline of such political formations. It is an analysis that would appear to have clear practical applicability e.g. for those involved in facilitating the exit from such groups by individual members, or for those seeking to assess the relative stability of such political formations.

Barrett-Fox's contribution examines the governance of emotions in the case of support for the Trump presidency from Religious Right leaders and voters in the USA. The article sets out how, while Trump spoke effectively to feelings of entitlement, fear, resentment, and the desire to dominate that characterise the Religious Right, support for and identification with Trump required his insertion into their historical narrative. As Barrett-Fox explains, they did this by conceiving of him as a "King Cyrus President", thereby situating him as a supporter, without necessarily being a member, of their community. The discussion traces how, in addition to enabling and consolidating their emotional entrainment with Trump, inserting Trump into their historical narrative in this way has rendered largely ineffective attempts by Trump's opponents to use his personal moral failings to undermine support for him among the Religious Right.

Kinnvall also considers how historical narratives, and in particular the creation of "an imagined ideological lineage from past to present," are used to shape the emotionality of contemporary backlash against the "liberal elite". The article traces how the interweaving of myths about the nation, the people, the establishment and immigrant others both "naturalize

colonial fears and postcolonial melancholia” and serve as explanations for “the imagined ills of western society.” Critically within the context of this special issue, the article also traces how these myths “constitute both remedies to and origins of ontological insecurities,” since while they might serve to keep certain anxieties and fears temporarily at bay, they entail an impossible pursuit of a complete identity. If Kinnvall is right, this has far-reaching societal consequences, since it implies that any attempt to outmanoeuvre the radical right by competing with them to provide the type of shortcuts to ontological security in which such political formations deal, will ultimately serve to deepen this “ontological insecurity crisis.”

History is full of events that, with the benefit of hindsight, appear almost inevitable, but which few at the time, including experts, were able to foresee. As a case in point, not long after the publication of this special issue, the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU. The decision to hold a referendum, let alone the choice of the British public to vote to leave the EU, would have seemed scarcely believable just a few years ago. Now that the wheels of Brexit are in motion, the predictions – or perhaps the hopes – of the cheerleaders from both sides of the referendum are looking increasingly wide of the mark. Instead of Leavers’ visions of a country united in enthusiasm about a future defined by recovered sovereignty, and instead of Remainers’ visions of a country united in regret about stepping over the Brexit precipice, the country remains deeply divided. Indeed, Brexit has arguably “morphed into a battleground of derision and division” (Ramswell 2017: 217), with “Remainer” and “Leaver/Brexiter”, as well as their more derogatory variations, persisting as salient political identities that now cut across all areas of public life. What started off as the obsession of a small minority of individuals primarily on the radical right – very much an example of anti-establishment backlash – has transformed British politics and will continue to do so for the

foreseeable future. As Mueller argues, we must not allow analyses of such political developments to reduce them to some kind of "inarticulate political expression on the part of the supposed 'losers in the process of modernization'" (2017: 17). Yet emotions are part of the story and if, like the contributors to this special issue, we can integrate them into existing theories about the rise, fall, persistence and evolution of various forms of backlash politics, we might be better able not only to explain the developments that we observe unfolding around us, but also to think about how our responses to such politics might play out on the ground.

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